

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4979

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY MANILA

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SEOUL 5666

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR SHUM KS US PGOV

SUBJ: POLITICAL ATMOSPHERICS IN SEOUL: ANTI-AMERICAN FEELING;

PRESIDENT PAK'S POLITICAL STRENGTH; AND HOPE FOR PRISONER

RELEASE RISING

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT PAK HAS TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF CURRENT HIGH LEVEL OF KOREAN CONCERN OVER SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENTS IN US, AND HAS STRENGTHENED HIS DOMESTIC POLITICAL POSITION. HE IS USING THIS NEW POLITICAL STRENGTH TO BUILD NATIONAL UNITY BASICALLY ON HIS OWN TERMS BUT WITH CONCESSIONS TO THE OPPOSITION. HOPE IS HE WILL ALSO USE NEW CONFIDENCE AND STRENGTH TO RELEASE MYONGDONG PRISONERS. END SUMMARY.

1. ANTI-AMERICANISM - ANTI-AMERICAN FEELING HAS RISEN SHARPLY IN SEOUL IN RECENT WEEKS. DEEP CONCERNS AND FEARS ON THE PART OF ALL KOREANS ABOUT OUR GROUND FORCE WITHDRAWAL
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PLANS HAVE TURNED INTO SHARP ANGER AT U.S. IN MANY QUARTERS AS RESULT BLUE HOUSE BUGGING ALLEGATIONS, WHICH MANY HERE GENUINELY BELIEVE DESPITE DENIALS, AND CONGRESSMAN FRASER'S AND U.S. PRESS' "PREJUDICED HANDLING" OF TESTIMONY BY KIM HYONG-WOOK, WHO TO MAJORITY KNOWLEDGEABLE KOREANS IS UNSAVORY AND INCREDIBLE CHARACTER. PLAYED AGAINST BACKDROP OF WIDESPREAD KOREAN MISUNDERSTANDING OF USG PROCESSES AND

RELUCTANCE TO RECOGNIZE ROK'S MISTAKES, THESE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE PRODUCED SUSPICION AMONG GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS AND EVEN SOME OPPOSITON GROUPS THAT ELEMENTS OF USG, PRESS, AND CONGRESS ARE SOMEHOW CONSPIRING AGAINST ROK -- AND/OR ARE TRYING "TO GET" PRESIDENT PAK. THIS PERCEPTION, WHEN LINKED WITH DEEP CONCERNS OVER TROOP WITHDRAWAL, HAS GIVEN RISE TO MIXED FEAR AND ANGER THAT WE ARE FORSAKING ROK AND PROVING UNTRUSTWORTHY, WITH OUR COMMITMENT TO KOREA IN DOUBT.

2. CURRENT ANTI-AMERICAN FEELING MUST, HOWEVER, BE KEPT IN PERSPECTIVE. ON THE ONE HAND, MOFA AMERICAN BUREAU CHIEF PAK SANG-YONG COMPARED IT TO PREVIOUS HIGHPOINTS WHEN SYNGMAN RHEE REJECTED ARMISTICE NEGOTIATION AND PERIOD FOLLOWING PARK CHUNG-HUI'S COUP. WIDESPREAD PRESS CARPING, ENDLESS PRIVATE COMPLAINTS TO US, A STUDENT SURVEY SHOWING DISLIKE OF AMERICA ON THE RISE, AND SERIES OF MINOR ANTI-AMERICAN INCIDENTS SEEM TO BEAR THIS OUT TO A DEGREE. AT SAME TIME BUREAU DIRECTOR PAK UNDERCUT HIS OWN COMPARISON, SAYING HE THOUGHT PEAK OF ANIMOSITY HAD ALREADY BEEN PASSED. DESPITE WHAT WE DETECT AS GENUINE ANGER THERE IS A HOTCOLD SPIGOT-LIKE QUALITY IN KOREAN ATTITUDES AND MANY RESPONSIBLE FIGURES ADVISE US DAILY TO "KEEP COOL", KEEP LONG TERM PERSPECTIVE," AND "BE PATIENT." WE CONCLUDE THAT MANY KOREANS ARE GENUINELY ANGRY, BUT CONSTRAINING REALITY OF KOREANS' DEPENDENCE ON U.S. WILL REMAIN DOMINANT FACTOR SHAPING THEIR OUTLOOK. THESE ATTITUDES ARE NEVERTHELESS CONFIDENTIAL

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WORRISOME AND ARE CREATING SOME PROBLEMS, BUT AS ONE SOPHISTICATED ASSEMBLYMAN PUT IT: WITH REGROWTH OF TRUST IN THE SINCERITY OF OUR COMMITMENT, AN OBJECTIVE ALL KOREANS WISH FOR, OTHER PROBLEMS WILL BLOW AWAY.

3. PAK GAINS POLITICAL STRENGTH-THIS SAID,STRIKING FEATURE OF CURRENT WAVE OF ANTI-AMERICANISM IS HOW IT HAS WORKED TO PRESIDENT PAK'S POLITICAL ADVANTAGE. GIVEN BASIC FEARS ABOUT TROOP WITHDRAWALS, SOME OPPOSITON NDP LEADERS AND DISSIDENTS CLEARLY HOPED SOME WEEKS AGO TO BE ABLE TO SEIZE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO ATTACK ROKG AND PRESIDENT PAK FOR MISHANDLING U.S. RELATIONSHIP AND GENERATING U.S. TROOP DECISION. PAK WAS INCREASINGLY ISOLATED ON BOTH TROOP WITHDRAWAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES.PRESIDENT HOWEVER, TOOK THREE INITIATIVES.

4. FIRST HE SUMMONED "MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD" OPPOSITION NDP LEADER YI CHOL-SUNG TO KEY MEETING AT BLUE HOUSE (SEOUL 4535) WHERE YI MADE COMPROMISE DEAL WITH PRESIDENT NOT TO GO FOR GOVERNMENT'S THROAT ON THESE ISSUES DURING JUST COMPLETED ASSEMBLY SESSION; THE QUID REPORTEDLY WAS TROOP WITHDRAWAL RESOLUTION AND MUCH MORE IMPORTANT CONCESSION ON DEMOCRATIC

PROCESS IN ASSEMBLY AND ON HUMAN RIGHTS. SURPRISINGLY YI, WHO HAD UNTIL RECENTLY BEEN IN BAD REPUTE IN MANY CORNERS OF HIS OWN PARTY SOLD HIS DEAL WELL TO OTHER OPPOSITION MEMBERS AND MAINTAINED SUBSTANTIAL PARTY SUPPORT THROUGHOUT ASSEMBLY DEBATE AND NEGOTIATION.

5. AT ROUGHTLY SAME TIME, PRESIDENT TOOK SECOND STEP ON TROOP ISSUE WHERE HE HAD FOUND HIMSELF ISOLATED BY SAYING IN ESSENCE TO KOREAN PEOPLE HE DID NOT LIKE TROOP WITHDRAWAL ANY MORE THAN THEY DID, BUT THERE WAS NO REALISTIC ALTERNATIVE TO ACCEPTANCE U.S. DECISION. THEN, QUITE FORTUITOUSLY, RENEWAL OF U.S. PRESS ALLEGATIONS ON BUGGING PLUS KIM HYONG-WOOK HEARING REDOUNDED TO PAK'S BENEFIT BY DEFLECTING CONCERNS CUM ANGER TOWARD THE UNITED STATES. GOVERNMENT
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PARTIES HAVE VERY CLEARLY HELPED THIS PROCESS ALONG PUSHING DURING ASSEMBLY NEGOTIATION FOR TOUGH TROOP WITHDRAWAL AND ANTI-U.S. ACTIVITIES RESOLUTIONS.

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6. PAK'S THIRD INITIATIVE WAS RENEWAL OF HIS PERENNIAL CALL FOR NATIONAL UNITY TO FACE NEW SECURITY DEMANDS IMPOSED BY TROOP WITHDRAWAL. IT WAS SEED PLANTED IN FERTILE SOIL OF CURRENT SECURITY CONCERNS, AND PAK IS BUSILY REAPING POLITICAL HARVEST. IF THERE IS ONE THING ALL KOREANS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THESE DAYS IT IS SECURITY; RECENT BY-ELECTION VICTORY OF FORMER GOVERNMENT PROSECUTOR AND CELEBRATED "ANTI-COMMUNIST FIGHTER" O CHAE-TO IN A STRONG OPPOSITON DISTRICT IS JUST ONE STRIKING EXAMPLE OF THIS. AT SAME TIME ROK LEADER PUBLICLY IDENTIFIED AS BEST ABLE PROVIDE SECURITY OBVIOUSLY IS PAK CHUNG-HUI. IT IS A COMMONLY-ACCEPTED THOUGHT AMONG OPPOSITION AS WELL AS GOVERNMENT LEADERS THAT PAK HAS ONCE AGAIN SHREWDLY EXPLOITED EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS TO GAIN PERSONAL POLITICAL ADVANTAGE. IN SHORT, THROUGH HIS THREE INITIATIVES, WITH AN UNEXPECTED BOOST FROM US PRESS AND CONGRESS, PAK HAS TURNED A POTENTIAL POLITICAL MINUS INTO A SUBSTANTIAL CONFIDENTIAL

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PLUS.

7. A NEW POLITICAL DEAL? MOST INTRIGUING AND PERHAPS HOPEFUL ASPECT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS HAS BEEN LOOSENING OF INTERNAL RESTRAINTS AND PROMISE OF MORE. DISSIDENTS HAVE BEEN FEARFUL THAT U.S. WITHDRAWAL WOULD HAD PAK EXCUSE TO CALL FOR NATIONAL UNITY - WHICH HE HAS - AND THEN CRACK DOWN HARDER ON DISSIDENCE - WHICH HE HAS NOT- AT LEAST SO FAR. INDEED, THERE ARE NUMBER KEY DEVELOPMENTS WHICH ILLUSTRATE THE CONTRARY.

8. DESCRIBED AS POLITICALLY CONFIDENT THESE DAYS BY BLUE HOUSE SOURCES, PAK APPEARS TO BE USING HIS POLITICAL STRENGTH TO NAIL DOWN A MORE DURABLE AND MORE GENERALLY ACCEPTABLE LONG-TERM POLITICAL DEAL WITH OPPOSITON, WITHIN FRAMEWORK OF YUSHIN CONSTITUTION, BUT WITH SOME CONCESSIONS. THROUGHOUT SPRING SAVE FOR CONTINUATION OF PAST EM-9 CASES AND PURSUIT OF A FEW MORE, ROKG HAS BEEN NOTICEABLY MORE CIRCUMSPECT IN PICKING UP AND PROSECUTING DISSIDENTS. FOR THEIR PART OPPOSITION ELEMENTS TURNED QUIET SINCE SPRING OFFENSIVE: UNIVERSITY DISTURBANCES EXPECTED THIS SPRING, FOR EXAMPLE, WERE HELD TO A FEW SHORT BURSTS WITH LITTLE OR NO EFFECT. WHILE IT COULD HARDLY BE CALLED FREE SWINGING, PRESS REMAINS MORE OPEN THESE DAYS THAN IN RECENT YEARS WITH EDITORS ALLOWED TO DO OWN CENSORING. FUNDAMENTAL REASONS FOR THIS ARE: ROKG REALIZATION THAT WITH POROUS EXTERNAL NEWS BARRIER "COVER-UPS" BACKFIRE; THERE ARE POLITICAL PLUSES IN COOPTED AS AVERSE TO RESTRICTED PRESS; AND OPPORTUNISTIC REALIZATION THAT THINGS LIKE KIM HYONGAWOOK AFFAIR CAN WORK TO PAK REGIME DOMESTIC POLITICAL BENEFIT.

9. BEST AND MOST RECENT ILLUSTRATION OF NEW POLITICAL
FORMULA THAT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN WORKED OUT IS ACTIVITY
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DURING NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION. ASSEMBLY
TRULY WORKED HARD AND WORKED OVER THE MINISTRIES ON BOTH
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL QUESTIONS. CHONG IL-KWON PUTS IT
THAT THE OPPOSITON HAS "GOTTEN AWAY WITH MURDER." BETTER
DESCRIPTION, HOWEVER, IS THAT, FOR FIRST TIME SINCE INTRO-
DUCTION YUSHIN CONSTITUTION, ASSEMBLY ACTUALLY ENGAGED NOT
ONLY IN DEBATE BUT IN SUBSTANTIAL POLITICAL BARGAINING
ON IMPORTANT POINT - THE SET OF RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
ON TROOP WITHDRAWAL, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND "HARMFUL"
U.S. ACTIONS (SEOUL 5577). AT COST OF STRONG ANTI-TROOPP
WITHDRAWAL AND ANTI-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES RESOLUTIONS,
GOVERNMENT PARTIES MADE SUBSTANTIAL CONCESSION TO OPPOSITION
IN FORM OF JOINT RECOMMENDATION FOR "GENEROSITY" TO
VIOLATORS OF EMERGENCY MEASURS ON BASIS OF NEBULOUS AGREEMENT
TO REPENT. THUS WE HAVE PARADOXICAL RESULT, FROM U.S. POINT
OF VIEW, OF JOINT RECOMMENDATION FOR PRISONER RELEASE, AT
COST OF JOINT-GOVERNMENT/OPPOSITION RESOLUTIONS ATTACKING US.

10. WWE WOULD UNDERLINE THAT NOTHING IN ALL THIS PROMISES
FUNDAMENTAL POLITICAL CHANGE. STRONG ANTI-GOVERNMENT
OPPOSITON PEOPLE SEE PRESIDENT PAK AND OPPOSITION LEADER
YI SIMPLY ENGAGED IN "CHARADE" TO EUCHRE PEOPLE'S FREEDOMS.
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS THEMSELVES SAY IT IS NOT YET TIME TO
RELAX EMERGENCY MEASURE NUMBER NINE (EM-9) ALTHOUGH
ASSEMBLY "RECOMMENDATION" ALSO PROVIDES SMALL OPENING
FOR LIFTING EM-9. DO DOUBT PAK RETAINS HIS COMMAND OF THE
SITUATION BUT HE SEEMS CONFIDENT OF YI'S SUPPORT. THERE IS
ALWAYS THE PROPSECT THAT, IN THE INTEREST OF "NATIONAL
UNITY," HE WILL REVERT TO TOUGHER TACTICS. HE AMOST
CERTAINLY WILL IF THE OPPOSITION "GETS OUT OF LINE".

11. FACT REMAINS, HOWEVER, AT MOMENT WITH HELP OF YI CHOL-
SUNG, AMONG OTHERS, PAK APPEARS MORE CONFIDENT OF HIS
POSITION AND BENT ON STRIKING MORE UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTABLE
POLITICAL CONTRACT, WHICH INVOLVES SOME RELAXATION OF
CONTROLS. ONE EFFECT OF THIS POLICY IS TO ISOLATE MOST
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ADAMANT OF ANTI-PAK DISSIDENTS EVEN MORE THAN BEFORE
AND MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR MYONGDONG AND KIM DAE-JUNG
SUPPORTERS TO MAINTAIN THEIR POLITICAL POSITIONS. THEY

WILL BARGAIN STUBBORNLY TO ASSURE THAT PRISONERS DO NOT
HAVE TO EAT CROW TO OBTAIN THEIR RELEASE. BUT POLITICAL PRESSURES
ON PRISONERS AND FAMILIES TO COMPROMISE EVEN FROM SUPPORTERS,
WILL BE GREAT. IF ROKG IS PERSUASIVE MOST STRIKING RESULT OF
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS APART FROM SHOT OF ADRENELIN GIVEN NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY COULD BE EARLY RELEASE OF AT LEAST SOME OF MYONGDONG
DEFENDENTS AND POSSIBLY OTHER EM-9 PRISONERS. MANY POLITICAL
OBSERVERS HERE ARE PREDICTING AUGUST 15. IT SEEMS A REALISTIC
POSSIBILITY TO BE HOPED FOR. BUT, AS SPEAKER CHUNG IL-KWON PUT IT,
DIM DAE-JUNG REMAINS A MAJOR HEADACHE FOR GOVERNMENT.
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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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